

63hh- Overcoming Anxiety

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How do I overcome anxiety? That's something everybody will wonder about at some point in their life and probably for many people today, it's quite a pressing issue. The first necessary step and thing to realize is that you need to stop resisting or trying to get rid of that anxiety.

It's good that you see anxiety as a problem so that you don't just go around trying to ignore or forget about it through engaging with sensuality, but at the same time, you do have to understand the difference between - wanting to be free from anxiety in the long run and trying to get rid of it immediately, right here and now. That pressing and impatient need of removing it as soon as it arises or as soon as it starts arising is what makes it so much more unpleasant. If you stop trying to get rid of it, then you will be able to see it for what it is. And what it is, is that it's not a problem that has arisen on account of a mistake. It's a mirroring of the very basic, very primordial, existential principle or an existential discrepancy which is that this life of mine, my own life, my environment, it's not my own, in a sense that fundamentally things upon which my life rests, things that determine my life are not in my control.

The Existential Discrepancy

Anxiety is just a revelation of the most certain thing when it comes down to your existence. And that thing is that your existence is not in your control, which doesn't mean that your choices are not in your control, but means that choices are already within that existence that you have no say in. You have no say in the fundamental aspects of your environment, in the circumstances that can affect your life, you can only do the best you can within that limited amount of control that you are given. But if you look at it closely, fundamentally no amount of control can ever change or upturn that order and truly make you the master of your own experience, of your own life. Why? Because fundamentally, the fact that you're going to be subjected to elements, to adverse change or positive change, the fact that that remains there as something you're fundamentally and utterly subjected to. That's exactly what anxiety reveals. It reveals the discrepancy between the assumption of your world and the actual nature of it.

That's also why anxiety is unpleasant. If you were to remove the discrepancy, if you were to remove the view that believes that you are the master of your feelings, for example, then that will remove the unpleasant aspect of anxiety and then anxiety will not be anxiety as you know it, it would simply be a recognition of the fundamental principle of life, which is "it is not in your control", "it cannot be yours". By that I mean you cannot be the owner because if you were truly the owner, the life, the feelings would obey you. You would feel only what you want to feel. You will experience only what you want to experience. But the fact that that is simply not possible, you end up living your life at odds with the very nature of it. Your attitude towards your feelings, pleasure, displeasure, or neutral, is at odds with the actual nature of those feelings. They arise on their own, they manifest themselves to you. And that's where the problem arises whereby, when pleasant feelings manifest themselves to you, you want them and you feel fully entitled in doing so, you feel fully entitled in going after them. You feel fully entitled in entertaining them, building your decisions or choices

upon them, and so on. And then when you have a disagreeable feeling arise, you equally feel fully entitled to try to get rid of it right away thinking, “I must not be feeling this, I should not be feeling this”. So when it comes to such a subtle, overwhelming yet so general experience of unpleasant anxiety, the first thing is to stop acting out of that sense of, “I have a right to not want this”. Whatever has arisen, it has arisen on its own, be it this feeling, or that feeling, which means your ‘rights’ stop there, so to speak. You have a right to choose this or that, you have a right to take responsibility for your choices. But you don’t have a right to not feel this, because whatever is being felt, it’s felt based on this life that’s subjected to feelings.

Removal Of The Wrong View

It’s not about freeing yourself from the unpleasant feeling, it’s about freeing yourself from the view that you impose upon the very present experience that you have that then results in this disparity felt as anxious suffering. You can’t get rid of that view overnight. You can’t just suddenly shift your view and be free from everything that bothers you. ‘View’ is like a habit of perceiving things a certain way. So now you need to reprogram the way you perceive things. And you can do so when you start following the principles for reprogramming and not just continually act out when things are unpleasant, and then when the unpleasant anxiety is gone, you forget about it and pretend like it was never there and your life is fine.

There’s no such thing as ‘a fine life’, as in there is no such thing as normal life free from anxiety or suffering. There is no such thing as a life that doesn’t require taking up responsibility. That doesn’t require work. That’s not optional. What is optional is how you’re going to go about it. Are you going to try and mask the fact that anxiety reveals to you the most fundamental nature of your existence, that you’re not in your control, that your life is not in your control? Are you going to try to pretend it’s not there by distracting yourself with sensual pleasures? Or are you going to start accepting responsibility for it and start looking at it?

By taking responsibility for it and not hiding away, you will still sometimes feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable. And that’s pretty much because most of your habits are still concerned with running away and not accepting it. So it’s gonna take time to be able to accept it. And once you do, then you will realize that the unpleasant aspect of anxiety, it’s not necessary. Anxiety in itself is a revelation of that discrepancy, an insight into the uncertainty of existence. That uncomfortable insight is absolutely fine. That’s just how it is. You remove the discrepancy, you remove that displeasure of that anxiety.

Resistance or Acceptance

A good starting point is to stop expecting an overnight solution and stop trying to get rid of it. That’s the most important. And if you have thoughts of how great things would be without this anxiety, you can use that as a motivation to make the effort to understand anxiety, but don’t use that as a justification to want to get rid of it. Because the notions you have of how great it will be to be anxiety free are just fantasies. If life was in your control and the way you think it is. Anxiety would be inconceivable. But the fact that it isn’t, the fact that it has arisen, the fact that you’re experiencing it means now you have an option, you’re either going

to pretend that that's a mistake or you're going to start looking into your attitude towards your own life and realize that that's the bit that needs changing.

As I said, anxiety is a symptom of a problem, it's not the problem itself. It reveals the discrepancy that you generate and maintain with your attitude towards your existence. It's not the problem of your existence. Existence itself is not a problem. The problem arises when there is a discrepancy and when there is a certain disparity. And that's what normal is. Normal life is the life based upon that disparity, based on a contradiction. And that's why normal life requires constant engagement and maintenance to cover the fact that it is not your own. That's also why people are afraid of solitude. The fear of solitude, for example, just starts pointing you back towards that which you're running away from with your daily distractions, actions, projects and meanings, and so on. When you're alone, you're just left with your thoughts and what's going to show itself first is going to be boredom, then it's going to be dread and anxiety, because your whole life is about covering that up, constantly floating on the surface so as not to experience what's underneath.

If existence were perfect, if existence is the way you think it is, then no unpleasant things would be conceivable. Anxiety and displeasure would be inconceivable. Why? Because you would be the master of your experience and things will be corresponding to that mastery, your choices, your feelings, your intentions, which means there will be no discrepancy to be felt as displeasure.

Reprogramming

So it comes down to changing your view regarding your existence. Upgrading it, because it is an upgrade. Once you become aware of the problem, once you become aware of the anxiety, that means you become aware, unwillingly, of the essential aspect of your own life. And it's very unpleasant, not in itself but it's unpleasant because of your assumptions regarding your own life that are at odds with it.

Stopping to try and get rid of the anxiety is the first step. The second step is to start looking at it as a symptom of a problem, not as the problem itself, not as something I must deal with but as something that has an underlying cause that's being revealed to me through that symptom called anxiety. And that underlying cause is the very nature of your life, of your feelings, of things you're subjected to, being at odds with what you think those things are or what you feel those things should be.

That wrong view, that assumption carries a sense of entitlement and for that assumption, you're responsible simply because you don't contemplate that underlying nature of experience. In other words, you don't dwell enough on the fact that you are not in your control, you don't dwell enough on the fact that feelings arise on their own, and you're subjected to them. I mean you can act out of them, you can try to cover them up. But fundamentally, you can never uproot your liability to feel pleasure, pain, or neutral, you just can't. So your efforts are only secondary. The amount of input that you can make is only relative, it cannot fundamentally upturn that picture. But see, not thinking about these things and feeling entitled to not think about these things, and then feeling even further entitlement towards sensuality, chasing sense pleasures, craving and ambition in life, and trying to get your desires fulfilled. That's how you proliferate that very discrepancy between how things are and how you think they should be. And that's exactly where anxiety is.

Removing your expectation of how things should be, and learning how to accept the way things are is not something that you can do in a second. You have to keep drilling in that knowledge and practice. You have to keep training yourself regarding it. Because you're not just dealing with one particular problem. You're reprogramming the entire attitude towards your existence and that takes time and repetition until you undo the wrong programming habits, habits of trying to get rid of the unpleasant feelings as soon as they manifested, habits of trying to run away from the unpleasant feelings as soon as they're manifested.

The Problem And Your Choice

Why is an unpleasant feeling, be it anxiety or anything else, why is it my problem? The anxiety emerges and it feels unpleasant. Why is that an issue? Why do I immediately think I must get rid of this? You are still fully aware and fully accountable for your actions, so you don't need to choose or decide to do anything on account of it. Why can you not just be with it? And equally, when pleasant feelings, when enticing perceptions manifest themselves and you want that pleasure, ask yourself why do I have to follow this desire? Why can I not just remain equanimous towards it?

Again, neither sensual desire nor anxiety or unpleasant feeling makes you act, you are the one who chooses to act upon those things. Yes, they can exert different pressures and a different pressure means different amounts of discrepancy. And that depends on where your views are at. The more you feel entitled to sensuality, the more pressure it's going to exhibit on you. And the more entitled you feel to be free from any unpleasant feeling, the more frightening anxiety will be. But again, it doesn't matter how much fear or how much pressure towards sensual pleasure is manifested. You are the one fundamentally and ultimately, who decides to act or not act out of it. That's where your responsibility is.

You can realize "I don't have to act out of this. I don't have to do anything on account of the arisen anxiety. I could just patiently endure it. But then the mind will be saying "I must get rid of it!", but I'll withstand that thought as well. I'll endure those states of mind." Why? Because fundamentally, as I said, anxiety is not the issue that accidentally or mistakenly arose on account of your perfect existence. Anxiety is an issue that reveals to you that existence in its nature is imperfect. But the imperfection, it's not in existence, it's in your attitude toward your existence. That's why anxiety is like an existential awakening.

Subject To Anxiety

Everybody experiences anxiety, that's not optional. Everybody is subjected to it. The difference is that most people can maintain that thin layer of ignorance, a very frail layer of ignorance upon it so that they can pretend it's not there. But it is, it's always there, it always has been and will be for as long as the view towards your existence is at odds with the existence.

Despite that it's always there, some people are still able to keep distracting themselves from it. But that doesn't mean they're dealing with it. It actually makes things worse, the more you're distracting yourself from it. The more the habit that results in the discrepancy is being reinforced. So if you spend your whole

life running away from anxiety, it ultimately catches up with you. When death comes, how do you think it's going to feel? If public speaking or other such things cause you anxiety, how do you think you will feel when your life starts to shut down? How is that going to feel when even little threats to your existence make you anxious? Imagine when that threat is being realized. The point is, that is what anxiety shows you, that your life can end at any given time and you have no say in that yet you live your life as if you have a say in that. Your health can end at any given time. Yet you're fully intoxicated with the fact that you're not ill now and you think you're never going to get ill. Same with youth, strength, and age. Those things are inevitable and so it is better to tailor your views and attitudes towards your existence to match that so that there is no more discrepancy affecting you and making you suffer when it comes.

Freedom From The Discrepancy

The correct practice is to stop trying to not get rid of anxiety, accept it (not welcome it), and then develop an attitude towards it as a symptom of an underlying problem, not an issue in itself. And to uproot the underlying issue that anxiety is a symptom of, you have to start modifying your own life and your views towards it. If you feel like "Oh, it's too much work, look at all these happy people around me." That's your mind playing tricks on you, in a way that's just lazy thinking, "I don't want to do work. Look at all these happy people, I just want to be like that, I just want this to go away." That is wishful thinking. You can carry on wishing that and the more you wish the more you'll be subjected to that discrepancy. Or you could take responsibility for it and realize that this is something worth addressing.

If you truly properly address it and deal with it. That's it, there is no discrepancy to be felt. That's true freedom. There will be no pressure of sense desires that you can or cannot fulfill, there will be no fear. There still may be thoughts, "What if this happens, etc", but those thoughts are now not causing any discrepancy because you have no expectations, certainly not assumed fixed expectations such as "Oh, this must happen or this should happen." So in that sense, anxiety is still there. But now you are not there with it anymore. You went beyond it. The reason it bothers you is that it threatens to overwhelm you. But it threatens to overwhelm you because you're too weak regarding it. And you're too weak regarding it because you never want to take responsibility for developing strength towards it. But if you do so, and you make that effort of being able to allow it to endure, not carelessly acting out of a habit of trying to get rid of it, not carelessly trying to distract yourself from it through sensual pursuits, then you see it coming and going, yet your mind composure will remain unchanged. And that is true freedom when you are no longer liable to the pressure of what is felt. Whenever they arise and whatever they might be. So when there is pleasure, you're not trying to get more of it automatically, when there's pain, you're not trying to get rid of it automatically. And when there's neither pleasure nor pain, you're not distracted automatically. The feeling arises and endures, but the mental state, the composure of your mind remains completely unaffected by that.

This should also answer the question of whether there is some meditation technique you can do to overcome anxiety. That question, as it should be clear from this by now, would be coming from the view that I should be getting rid of this, that I should not feel anxiety in the first place. And so once you stop having such expectations, you realize there is no prescription method that you can do, that will then prevent you from feeling this. There is no prescription method that would prevent you from existing while you are

existing, there is no such thing. The most important thing you can do regarding the experience of anxiety is to swallow the hard pill of truth in the sense that you realize it shows you what existence is about. It's not something that can be ignored. If you're able to accept that as the truth, that's already a massive step forward.

To not be affected by anxiety, you have to stop trying to get rid of it. In the same sense, you can't get rid of your existence, you can only grow out of that anxiety whereby when it arises, you are no longer affected. And the only way you stop being affected by it is if you stop running away from it, which keeps giving it power.

Anxiety is a symptom that reveals the underlying nature of your existence, which is not what you assume yourself to be. So if you're willing to accept it as such, that's already half of the problem gone.

The Buddha asks which feeling is yours, as in which feeling do you think you are in control of because they keep changing? If you were truly the controller, you would only feel what you want to feel. And you can apply the same principle to your thoughts. If you are truly the controller of your thoughts, you will only think what you want to think, but in reality thoughts manifest themselves, they present themselves to you and then you make choices and decisions based upon that. But fundamentally, they have arisen on their own. That's why you are ultimately responsible for your actions, no matter the thoughts arising on their own, no matter the feelings pressuring you. None of that can make you act, only your choosing to act makes you act. And that's what you're fully responsible for. There is no excuse for that. You can blame feelings, the arisen thoughts, or intentions but again you are the one who chooses that to be the reason for your actions.

That's why acceptance of what you're subjected to in terms of feeling, in terms of thoughts, in terms of the environment is important so that you can see where the real problem is, which is in the discrepancy that you maintain, regarding things that you're subjected to. If a certain type of environment is causing you overwhelming anxiety, sure, tone it down a bit, don't expose yourself to it, but not for the sake of sheltering yourself from anxiety, just for the sake of giving yourself a bit of a break, so that you can regain strength to deal with it. And you don't deal with it by going straight into what makes you anxious. No, you deal with it, by changing, upgrading, reprogramming your views about that thing that causes you anxiety or about life in general, your expectations, your entitlements, your assumptions. If you get that to match the actual nature of existence, the actual nature of your life, then there will be no discrepancy. The less disparity between the two, the less amount of symptoms will be showing.

It's gradual work, gradual effort, gradual acceptance, and gradual reprogramming. And you can only do so by reflecting upon it, not through mechanical sets of observances and rules. You can only do so by accepting the fearful aspect of it bit by bit, but you realize "That's the work that needs to be done". Not "That's the work that I must get rid of." It's done when it doesn't affect you. It's not done when it is just not there. Because as I said, anxiety mirrors the nature of existence, which means in a way, that mirror is always there. It's just whether you're going to suffer on account of it or not.
